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The Humanizing Christ

BY FREDERICK F. SHANNON

And the Word became flesh. John 1:14.

NOT often does the introduction of a sermon come to me as a kind of providential gift. Yet the postman has just proved himself the instrument of such a homiletic benevolence. It comes in a letter from a biologist containing these words of Sir James Jeans: "Instruments of research disclose a fairly self-contained region of phenomena. We may properly suppose that a reality, which we may describe as the physical universe, underlies it. Whether this is the whole of reality is a matter for debate. Some biologists believe that this domain includes the whole domain of biology; others prefer to think that a connecting passageway leads from this domain of physics to a whole new domain of life."

Just then St. John suddenly stepped out of the past, which is always with us, and seemed to say: "Thank you, brethren, for your instruments of research and your fairly self-contained region of phenomena. Thank you, also, for your supposition that a reality describable as the physical universe underlies it. Thank you, further, for admitting that the physical universe underlying the fairly self-contained phenomena may not be the whole of reality, and is, therefore, open to debate. Thank you, once more, for reminding us that some biologists 'prefer to think that a connecting passageway leads from this domain of physics to a whole new domain of life.' And thank you, finally, brethren, for the privilege of declaring unto you, while you devoutly search and toilsomely speculate, that the connecting passageway from the domain of physics to a whole new domain of life, is the Word which became flesh nearly two thousand Christmases ago and is still, moment by moment, reincarnating himself in the soul of the race he created, redeems, and glorifies."

Our subject is "The Humanizing Christ." And does not the text compel us to ask, with Plato, "whether all this which they call the universe is left to the guidance

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of unreason and chance medley, or on the contrary, as our fathers declared, is ordered and governed by a marvelous intelligence and wisdom"? So is the philosopher's noble interrogation answered by the apostle's lofty exclamation: "O the depth of the riches both of *this* wisdom and *this* knowledge of God!"

I

Consider that our Lord *humanizes God.* "And the Word became flesh." Signifying many things, these five words mean, first, that back of our humanity and the humanities is the eternal humanity of God. God did not *begin* to be human when he *became* flesh; nor did he first incarnate himself in the babe of Bethlehem. But by his incarnation in and through that babe, God does something unique, solitary, without precedent and without repetition; and he does it with an adequacy of moral power and an absoluteness of perfection which neither the universe nor angels nor men may approximate.

This, surely, is a truth whose spiritual grandeur, resting upon ultimate reality, is enough to raise our low spiritual blood pressure and cure, at the same time, our unchristian morbidness even while it redeems, vitalizes, and imparts meaning to our philosophic conundrums. For the Christ of God and the St. John of Christ heartily agree, I think, with one of the acutest of living thinkers, "If we are going to have a God at all we might as well have one worth having." Which means that we are not to have a God in whose essential being there are shady imperfections due to finite inhibitions read into the Godhead by exceedingly finite philosophers. If you were to ask me how Something more ancient than the worlds, Something wiser than even the wisest of our confused and confusing moderns, Something vast enough to honor the character of God revealed in Christ, and vast enough, also, to conceive and carry through the redemption of a world of human beings so abysmally lost—how that Something could embody himself so that he could seize and be seized "in the flash and clench of the personal human will," I would answer: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Thus the Infinite Humanity abides back of and within our finite humanity.

How Can Such a Thing Be?

Another thing: Here, I think, is the final solution of the union of the infinite and the finite. This thought-problem, so old and yet so modern, inevitably poses the question: *How* can such a thing be? The only honest answer is, we do not know. Impinging upon the mystery of being itself, it is one of the many mysteries hidden within the depths of deity; it refuses to declare, if you will forgive the words, its *modus operandi.* And not only the fact of being, but its expression in terms and acts of reason and ethics, is another of the sublime incomprehensibles. "The problem of the connection of body and soul is as insoluble in its modern form as it was in the prescientific ages," says a great physicist. I recall, in this connection, another of his statements: "The passage from the physics of the brain to the corresponding facts of consciousness is inconceivable as the result of mechanism." Hence, if the fact of being is insoluble, the manifestation of being in the facts of consciousness is unthinkable as a consequence of mechanical forces, however wonderful and august in their action and interaction.

A Mystery, but a Fact!

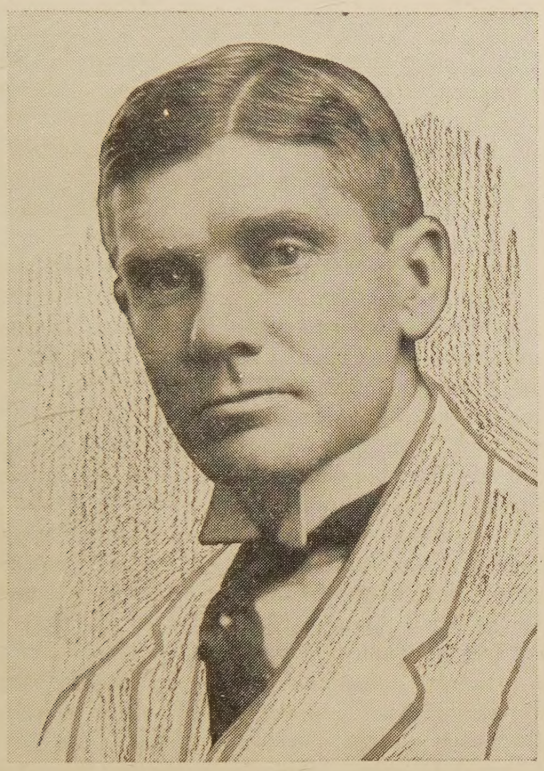
Yet the union of infinite and finite is a fact! Moreover, because we do not know—may never know in time or eternity—the *how* of it, does not preclude the mind of man trying, age in and age out, to pluck the heart out of this mystery. Nor, on the contrary, should we forget that the fact of such union is more important for thought, faith, hope, love, and life than even the how of its deeply enshadowed yet forever enchanting processes. Once more, and not the least important angle, is this: Both the facts of the integration (because there is wholeness in electrons as in universes) and insolubleness of the union of infinite and finite are immense with antiquity and omnipresence. The antiquity of it dates back to the faintest creative beginnings of the Ancient of Days, to what Coleridge calls "the first simultaneous burst of Godhead." The omnipresence of it is in every atom and star, in every germ and leaf, in every wind and wave, in every animal and human, else of these there would be not one—not even for the millionth of the split second in which this thought is beginning to shape itself into words!

"Watch out," you exclaim, "or the goblin of Spinozism will swallow you alive!" Thank you for the warning, and also for the opportunity of reminding ourselves of the immeasurable gulf between Spinozist pantheism and Christian theism. In the first place, pantheism as embodied in Spinoza holds an overwhelming contradiction for thought itself. For does not his Substance, which he calls God, have both extension and *thought?* And yet Spinoza's Substance-God lacks personality—at least in the Platonic, and, more important still, the Christian sense of the term. Now—whatever we do with his concept of substance—*thought,* apart from personality, is in itself inconceivable—a contradiction that forever *places* Spinoza, who was not, in the true sense, a God-intoxicated human but a universe-intoxicated philosopher. In other words, Benedict Spinoza, the lofty character and noble person, is in his philosophy a denial of one of the foundation facts of his whole system: that thought is either possible or conceivable apart from personality.

Conversely, Christian theism—not just theism, which may have all the colors of philosophic rainbows yet be lacking in the basic and primal white—reveals the infinitely personal God. Eternally self-conscious, he is before all things, creates all things, is in all things, is over all things, and momentarily, as well as permanently, sustains all things. For the cosmos is not, in the last analysis, held together by law. However majestic law may be, and it interlaces the whole system of being from atom to angel, it is at most modal, never causative, never creative, and never can be. Law is the method by which the illimitably personal God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ creates

the universe and keeps it a going concern, redeems the souls of men and makes them know the immeasurable worth of their own redemption. According to Christianity, the whole creation of God is completed in redemption by the Christ of God. Here, and here alone, we have brought home to us what the philosopher-preacher calls the Christlike God's passion for righteousness and compassion for humanity in perfect combination.

Thus are we back at our point of departure. Unable to fathom the *how* of being; unable, also, to understand the process of union of infinite and finite, we know each to be a fact, and facts at once ancient and omnipresent. Are we not ready, now, to reaffirm the revealed ade-



FREDERICK F. SHANNON

quacy and inexhaustible splendor of our Christian Christmas theophany: "And the Word became flesh"? That which was in the beginning, that which was with God, that which was God—even that historically humanizes himself, supremely, through his own unbegun and eternal Humanity. If, as Rufus Jones contends, one of the philosophic achievements of today is its emphasis on "the concrete infinite," it is but the philosophic expression of the religious reality when the Divine Almightiness concreted himself in his eternal All-Loveliness at Bethlehem.

II

Consider, moreover, that, in humanizing God, our Lord *humanizes nature.* "And the Word became flesh"—this is gloriously true, but it is not all the truth the words contain; their implications are immense with spiritual awe, intellectual magnificence, and enriching interpretation. I mean this: For millions of ages before the Word became flesh, *he* (not *it,* as Philo, Spinoza, and their twentieth century disciples would say), became countless other things. Let me put it just as baldly and as boldly as I can. He became firemist; he became order; he became space and time; he became electrons and stars; he became wind and water; he became light and darkness; he became plants and animals; he became everything in the vast system of created, ordered and sentient being. Furthermore, he became what Hindu, Assyrian, and Egyptian dreamed at their best; what Greek and Roman visioned at their highest; what medievalist, fundamentalist, and modernist have thought at their truest—all these things the Word not only became but is always becoming.

Now, having said it with premeditated baldness and confusion of thought and fact, I wish to distinguish and qualify the whole with due regard for what Bacon calls the likeness and difference in things, the definite resemblance and the differentiating reality at the heart of the whole. For the Word, through self-embodiment in the universe and flesh, does not become *either* and *all;* he is *more,* infinitely, eternally more, than either and all can ever be; and more, if you please, than they can ever be by the very nature of God and the constitution of things and creatures themselves. Nor are we without the most intimate and vivid objectification of this truth, at once limited and illimitable in its suggestiveness, by virtue of our own human nature. Humanity, in this world at least, is inconceivable apart from flesh and blood. Yet is it a truism of thought and experience that no human being is, or can be, only flesh and blood. Therefore, all normal humans make the poet's confession their own: "This body is my house, it is not I." So, on the larger scale of immensity and eternity, the God of all beginnings and yet the unbeginning God says, "This universe is my house, it is not I."

God Is Free

But what has all this to do with the humanizing of nature by Jesus the Christ, the Word who became and becomes flesh, Lord of life and Savior of men? Much in every way. For instance, it gives me a clue to the humanizing activity of God in nature without his becoming the prisoner of nature or law in any way whatsoever. I find that miracles are such only to me; that, at bottom, the whole order of nature is, to me—and in fact, if not in theory, to all men—one absolute, inscrutable, and continuous miracle. Yet nature, inside and out, visible and invisible, is not nor can be, in any sense, a miracle to God. I think the whole is as natural to him as it is natural for me to view it all as supernaturally natural. Unutterably law-abiding, God in Christ is, to me, unutterably free—free to turn water into wine, free to command winds and waves, free to feed the multitudes, free to forgive sins of the sinful, free to open the eyes of the blind, free to raise the physically and spiritually dead. Free to do all these things, God is likewise free to impregnate a maiden of Galilee with his own divine humanity as he is free to carry on the work of virgin creation in plants and flowers. "The being of God," says the immortal Hooker, "is a kind of law to his working." And becoming flesh is, to the Christlike God, the morally redemptive expression of his own self-giving Fatherhood,

at once the lowliest and loftiest of his adumbrations in the heavens or upon the earth.

The "Highest Criticism"

Therefore, I believe it incompetent just to say that the relation of Jesus to the natural world is not that of scientist or philosopher, "but a spiritual teacher." That he is a spiritual teacher without a peer is true. In the inclusive sweep of his tremendous understanding and eternity-haunted imagination, he reads off and interprets the beauty of nature without ignoring its ruthlessness and horror. True, also, he fulfils what is called the three-fold function of art, which teaches us to *see,* teaches us *what* to see, and teaches us to see *more than we see.* Grant, likewise, that the very wealth of his insight into natural phenomena is invested from beginning to end with what the scholar calls "ordinary human interest"—interest which must dominate every artist and worker of the first order in poetry, sculpture, architecture, painting, music, philosophy, and statesmanship. All this and more is not only admitted but required, even demanded, by the New Testament records.

Still, I insist that all of it is not enough; nor does it cover the "vestigial remains," so to speak, of these self-same records even after they have weathered the storms of higher criticism, lower criticism, and no criticism. And why? Because the Highest Criticism named the Word—the Word which was in the beginning, the Word which was with God, the Word which was God, the Word which became flesh—this Highest Criticism, I say, demands an answer to this question: What can he do *with* nature while in his enfleshed and purposely limited condition? Is he just a magician or is he nature's actual, because eternal, Master? Has the nexus between the infinite and the finite been severed by the Eternal humanizing himself, or does that nexus continue unbreakable, with sublime orderliness and majestic inviolability, through the birth, the growth, the teaching, the work, the death, the resurrection, the ascension, the impoured Spirit, and the leadership from eternity across both the blasted and blooming fields of time? Or, to put it in another way: Has the Lord God, by whom and in whom all external phenomena and all internal reality have their being, so self-emptied himself by the incarnation that, though he has superlative insights into and wonder-smiting interpretations of nature, yet, after all, he can do nothing *with* it or *about* it? As I see it, history says that he *can* and *did;* and the inference is that he does and will continue so to do as long as there is a natural order. Therefore, this fact —the Will of God, which is the creative and self-sustaining law of realms visible and invisible—alone makes possible a cosmos instead of a chaos.

Jesus and Nature

One who does not agree with this viewpoint complains that there are so many things in nature we fail to find in Jesus of Nazareth—the beauty of morning, the gold of sunset, the majesty of star-strewn spaces. To me the understanding and explanation of this viewpoint are quite clear. I hereby give it for its intrinsic mental and spiritual value: There is not, there never was, there never can be a *mere* and *only* Jesus of Nazareth; there is, on the contrary, *one Jesus of Nazareth who is the Christ of God.* If he be not *this,* he is either, first, a madman, or, second, a knave, and the most colossal in all history. But if he is *this*—and I believe he is beyond the power of words to say—he is, consequently, what he calls and proves himself to be: the Son of Man *because* he is the Son of God. Therefore, the humanity of God not only became flesh in him, but so humanizes the light which fires the skies of dawn and burns in the red of the rose, that he himself is the everlasting beauty dwelling within the perpetually changing forms of loveliness in earth and sky.

III

Our thought-movement brings us, inescapably, to the conclusion that our Lord *humanizes man.* We are by nature human beings, not just human animals; but in the light of the humanity of God in Christ we are still far away from the shining human goal set by the push and drive of the incarnation. Unveiling the humanity of God and nature, Jesus the Christ proceeds to light up the sin-blasting actual depths and the possible spiritual heights of mankind.

For the devilish and bedeviling actual depths are open all around us. Make no mistake about this fact! How it came and comes to be is, for the moment, another matter. Whether the original fall was a "fall downward" or a "fall upward," that fall, if it signifies sin, is the most horrible and destructive reality in our individual and social order.

Yet, to light up the unfathomable degradations in human life, is not the end but the beginning of God's far-flung goal in the incarnation. It is not enough to draw the indictment of man, however monstrous and just. Lucian, Paul, Gibbon, and Carlyle can do this in words that burn and blaze, while man's self-indictment, by choice and act, is more appalling and convincing still. What the All-Good and Eternal does in that helpless and hopeful bundle of flesh and blood folded in Mary's arms is this: he reveals God's way to us and our way to God. But he does not stop here nor at any of the milestones along history's winding pathway. At Bethlehem God concretes the infinite in his humanly embodied finite, and, at last, passes out of the universe that is seen into the universe that is unseen, that he may more powerfully and universally carry on his redemptive creations within the consciousness of humankind. Thence, verily, he comes into our souls and relives his own quality of deathless life within them. He cleanses the will at its roots; he purifies the heart at its center; he opens the understanding Godward; he sanctifies the imagination; he makes sound and sweet the intellect even as it grows stronger, keener, and more tenacious in its seizing and appropriating power for the Bread of Heaven by which men and angels live.

Infinite in Finite

Is not here, indeed, Something sufficient and inclusive enough to sift out all the chaff within the wheat of reality? Shaking the dross through its own holy-wise processes, it retains the golden grain for the granaries

of God. It claims and reclaims all in history that is good. Everything that is of worth in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Mohammedanism is duly credited and incorporated within its divinely immeasurable and irresistible becoming, permitting only the false to fall away through its own insufficiency. Pantheism, Theosophism, Humanism, Transcendentalism, Arianism, Socinianism, Sabellianism, Trinitarianism, Unitarianism, Eddyism—even that which so much as contains a hint of truth that is vital, humane, beautiful, eternal, is conserved in the Humanizing Christ. And no work, it seems to me, that God the Father achieves in and through the Son of his bosom, surpasses the humanizing of man himself. For the Word became flesh that he might become enfleshed in all men, thus crowning the created universe in the redemption of new-created souls.

Truths the Old Tales Tell

BY WILLIAM E. BROOKS

And of his kingdom there shall be no end. Luke 1:33.

THERE is little question that to many millions Christmas, this year, will not bring that forgetting of care that Christmas has usually brought. For care has crowded close to us this year and it has left us sore perplexed. And it will do us good to remember again the stories that cluster around Christmas as the gospels tell of the nativity, and that, not to ask the familiar questions that the modern critic propounds, but to remember what they meant to those first Christians of the long ago who went out to meet a more baffling world than ours, to face a more untoward circumstance. For I think, if we can catch again the wonder of that first meaning, the tales will quicken our faith and make us better fitted for the task that the New Year brings.

For back of most of today's despair is a certain hopelessness and a consequent aimlessness. We are like Kipling's king who sought to build a palace only to have it tumble into ruin because it was not his to finish the task. Others had failed before him, he too failed, others would fail after him. All he could do for a while was to build, knowing the uselessness of his building. Many of us are in the same mood. We need to remember something that Dostoievsky makes the Grand Inquisitor say, "The secret of man's being is not only to live but to have something to live for." The old tales of the first Christmas give us that something to live for.

I

First, there is the story of the annunciation. It was not the word that the strange messenger from God told Mary—that a son was to be born to her—that quickened the pulse of those early Christians, but the assurance that "of his kingdom there shall be no end." How utterly impossible that seemed against the background of the day! With Rome so powerful, how could Mary's son wield a scepter? It was Roman soldiers who were tramping the Bethlehem road that night when the inn's stables echoed to his first cry. It was Roman soldiers who murdered Bethlehem's babes that other night when Joseph hurried Mary and her son through the dark to their refuge in Egypt. It was Roman soldiers who nailed Jesus with harsh brutality to Rome's own chosen instrument of horrid death, and who filched the poor spoil of his garments to gamble for it at the cross's foot. And a Roman soldier stood his guard beside his tomb. From first to last Rome's power was about him, hedging him in, killing him at the last.

Yet these men of early faith dared to believe that Jesus was greater than Rome, so great that there would come a day when the word of the angel of the annunciation would be realized and every knee would bow to him and every tongue confess him Lord. It was that faith that made them choose the lions and death on the arena's sands rather than bow before the images of the Caesar. To trivial thinkers since those tragic days, it has perhaps seemed silly for them to die rather than go through the form of that required homage; but consider, if they had yielded, they would have given their whole case away. Christ, they held, was greater than Rome and some day all the world would know it. The truth in the story of the annunciation was what made them stiff-necked before Caesar's image. Rome might kill them, did kill many of them, but it could not kill their faith in the fact that "of his kingdom there shall be no end."

And of what fact more than that do we need to be assured today? We have seen the failure of modern Caesarism, the ruin wrought in the world by unbridled greed, by ruthless power. We are striving to shape a new world order in which men shall dwell as neighbors and as brothers, a world order that shall be safe because it is Christian. We are finding it a difficult task. The spirit of Caesarism has too long ruled the world to give up lightly the throne of power. And before we win the battle for the better day there will often come times when we grow afraid, so afraid that we will be in danger of losing the battle. We will need the faith of those first Christians if we are to conquer, their absolute daring faith that of his kingdom there shall be no end. That assurance held them steady in the most perilous days, held them so steady that men everywhere wondered and then turned to follow after them.

There is a strange tale that I heard long ago of how word came to a legion camped among the Alpine peaks, by the frozen waters of a lake, that a new decree had gone forth from the emperor that all Christians must pay homage to his image or die. So in the winter twilight the image was set up and the legion paraded before it. Forty men of the legion refused to bow and, stripped of their garments, they were ordered out on the ice to die of exposure. But the commander of the legion had watched these Christian soldiers, had seen that they were better than their comrades in the

performance of every duty. All night long he waited by the shore hoping that they would recant, hoping that he might not lose these soldiers, and all night long he heard their triumphant shout: "Forty wrestlers wrestling for thee, O Christ, claim for these the victory and from thee the crown." Then, as the morning broke, he saw one come slipping back to shore and throw himself before the image of the emperor. The song wavered for a moment and then broke forth again. The officer listened and then, unbuckling his sword and laying aside his armor and his garments, he hastened across the ice to take his place with them.

WILLIAM E. BROOKS

There was a faith that compelled. The early Christians had it. We need it now—and we shall always need it. It comes of a surety that we follow an undefeatable Conqueror!

II

And then there is the story of huddled shepherds about a midnight fire, and a strange light that filled the plain so that the light of the fire grew dim, and a song whose echoes have never died telling that he who was born that night in the inn was the bringer of a new spirit among men out of which would came new glory to God and peace to a harassed earth. There must have been wild laughter in Jerusalem when first that tale was told in its streets. For place was the last thing men thought of. And perhaps the light had hardly gone from the skies before the shepherds began to guess whether it was more than a dream. A poet pictures them sitting there before they start to Bethlehem, asking whether the whole thing was not a bitter, sarcastic joke of the heavenly powers:

When harvests fail and all the sheep are dead,
And little children cry and cry for bread,
Grow tired at last and sicken and lie still,
Will any sing of peace then and good will
To us who watch beside an empty bed?

And there is no question that many who have watched beside empty beds during these last months, helpless and beaten in a hopeless world, have had much the same reason that the shepherds had to think that a world of peace and order was simply a dream. Yet those early Christians dared to believe that it was something that would be, and further they gave their lives in an effort to realize it. As you study the records of those days you must believe that that was their confidence. Christ's kingdom would cover the earth, and it would bring peace where there had been no peace. While the old Roman world was tumbling in ruin about them they looked for the City that was to be, the City that was to come down from God out of heaven. That was the purpose behind their toil. And ours is a task of rebuilding. Let us go to it with the song of the angels in our ears. So shall we recover the assurance of those early days.

III

And a third tale those early Christians told themselves as they streamed out of doomed Jerusalem, in obedience to the Master's command to carry the word of him to "the uttermost parts of the earth," was the tale of the wise men who came riding out of the night to lay their homage and their gifts at his feet. I can fancy them telling each other the story as they took the long roads those wise men had traveled, down into Egypt with its memories of wars and old kings, to the lands of the east where strange dark tyrannies had so long held men's lives in thrall, to northern countries where our skin-clad fathers drenched the holy Druid oaks with the blood of young girls in sacrifice. "Perhaps," they would ask themselves, "it was from here that Gaspar came, or Melchior or Balthasar." It is little wonder that their imagination colored the story until these seekers for light became great kings attended by gorgeous trains and bearing the wealth of kingdoms to lay at the Christ child's feet.

But that was not wholly imaginative. It was the logical working out, in their thought, of his universal kingdom. These wise men were the trail-openers to the manger, the first of the great host that was to sweep in from all lands. Ever in their thought the kings were riding at the head of that host to offer homage and gifts to him who was the Lord of life. So with eagerness they went to tell his story, believing that all the world would hear. Nothing could frighten them, nothing could stop them: every fearful thing they met, every old securely entrenched tyranny, would some day yield to them. The wise men riding in the night out of unknown lands were hostages to the fact that some day those lands would be Christ's and everything that stood in the way of his kingdom would fall.

How much more valiant we would be if we had that faith! As we go about the task of undoing the social wrongs that make life unbearable, the political

evils that make it unsafe, the economic maladjustments that make it unsound, if only we could hear the tinkle of the camel-bells and know that

The Kings of the East are riding
Tonight to Bethlehem!

They who went out first with the tale of the manger saw the whole world his. A like faith is essential to the task that is ours in the rebuilding of the world that greed has destroyed.

And so it is good that just now Christmas comes again to remind us of the old tales that have so deep and compelling a meaning. They will bring faith back to us if we will see in them not something to puzzle over, but something to cheer, to inspire, as they did those who heard them first. Learning anew their wonder and their meaning, we will go to these discouraged cities of ours, to these men and women crushed beneath the load that a vicious order has laid upon them, to bring new faith and new courage. Then we will challenge men to wait and hear what they heard in Bethlehem long ago. To this day, as to Mary, comes the angel of the annunciation with the message that his kingdom shall have no end! And out of our darkness rings again the song that the listening shepherds heard. This is the word men need, this the call we need to sound.

And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the toiling way
With painful steps and slow—
Look now! for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing:
O rest beside the weary road
And hear the angels sing.

A Personal Confession of Faith

BY EDGAR DEWITT JONES

Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. Mark 9:24.

THIRTEEN years ago, I began my Detroit ministry. It was a far different city from the Detroit we know today. Prosperity was at its peak, or nearly. There was a feverish activity everywhere. Real estate changed hands over night with a profit on each transaction. It was extremely difficult to rent a house. Woodward avenue roared with traffic. Business was good, brisk. The great motor factories were working three shifts, seven days a week. The lobbies of the downtown hotels teemed with conversation away long after midnight. One wondered whether people went to bed in those brilliant downtown centers in the early twenties. Yet, the spirit of Detroit today is, I believe, more admirable than that of thirteen years ago. People then were gay, reckless, prosperous, and a little heartless. It is a more kindly, considerate, and thoughtful Detroit, this city that is broken materially and chastened by adversity.

My theme that morning thirteen years ago was "A Personal Confession of Faith." For some reason not wholly clear I did not prepare that sermon as is my usual custom. It was not written out in full, revised and typed. It does not appear in any of my files, and I have forgotten what I said, and the way I handled the theme. I do have a hazy recollection that in that sermon I attempted to justify my faith in coming to Detroit and accepting the vast responsibility that was laid upon me. For you know I was called here to build a metropolitan church. Today the discussion will be more personal and is a development out of the years that have flown so swiftly.

I

I believe in God! Of course, you would expect me to say that. If I did not believe in God, I would have no business in this pulpit or the Christian ministry. I cannot remember a time when I did not believe in God. I was brought up in an atmosphere of faith, and in a home where God was reverenced. The years have deepened and expanded my faith in God, as of course they should. I believe in the transcendence of God, that is, that he is over all, and I believe in the imminence of God, that is, that he is in all. Once I thought of God as possibly vengeful and capricious; I do not so think of him now. I think of One whose will for me is good, just, compassionate, perfect. I love to think of God as Jesus taught us to think of him. I find it good to reflect on the names of God in the Bible; for instance, "Jehovah," a word that carries with it the idea of awe, majesty, power. The translation of Professor Moffatt of the Old Testament in which he applies to God the term, "the Eternal," interests me greatly. I love most of all the phrases that Jesus used, "Father," "Our Father," "My Father." "Father" is a word full of comfort, sweetness, strength, and inexhaustible love. Few hymns so strengthen and fortify me as the old familiar words:

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope in years to come.
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

II

I believe in Christ! You would expect me to say this. Christ is the center of the Christian faith, and it would indeed be strange and sad if a teacher of the Christian religion disbelieved in the Founder of the faith. I cannot recall a time when I did not think of Christ as the Savior of the world and the lover of mankind. I was brought up on the old, old story as related in the four gospels. Very early the mystic communion of the Lord's supper drew my interest and fed my imagination, as I sat in awe while all about me partook of the loaf and the cup. There are many speculations about Jesus which may or may not be true. The theologians and the creed makers have been busy attempting to explain the two natures that were his, human and divine. I believe in Christ even when I am mystified, believe where I cannot prove. He was in some unique sense the Son of God and Son of Man. He lived in such harmony with the Eternal Spirit that he

came to know a joy, a power, and a peace, that can only be accounted for by his relationship with this Eternal Spirit. For 1900 years we have been calling him Lord and leaving undone many of the things he asked us to do. We have worshiped him, yet have failed to follow him in the wondrous way of life he taught and over which his own ministering feet went before us. I believe in Christ, his mind, the principles that he taught, the ideals for which he lived and died. I believe that his death was as unique as his life, that by his death he did not change the will of God toward humanity, rather he revealed that will. By the way he died he has changed myriad lives.

I believe in the second coming of Christ and a third coming and a fourth coming, and so on and on. I believe Christ is always coming, coming into society as men and women accept his law of the spirit, coming into nations as governments accept his principles of justice and good will. I believe he comes into our churches as we make him room and into our lives as we welcome him, the great Guest who says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him and he with me." I love to think of Christ as a returning Christ, always returning, and I can well believe that there will come a time when he will return in such spiritual triumph as would fully warrant the impressive imagery in the New Testament which multitudes have received literally. Yes, I believe in Christ, and I pray that I may learn to say with Browning:

> All outside is lone field, moon and such peace,
> Flowing in, filling up, as with a sea,
> Whereupon comes Someone, walks fast on the white,
> Jesus Christ's self. . . .
> To meet me and calm all things back again.

III

I believe in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, as a book of life, a literature of immense inspirational value. I can never recall the time when I could not lay my hands on a copy of the Holy Scriptures. The Bible was in my boyhood home. The large family Bible was there as well as smaller editions of the famous old book. I was reared and educated in a religious communion that has always made much of the Bible. Part of my education was received in an institution called "The College of the Bible," presided over by a man whose knowledge of the scriptures and devotion to them was truly remarkable; a college where the students studied the Bible itself, and memorized immortal passages from the scriptures. I believe in the Bible as a supreme literature that was assembled slowly, gradually, as the Jewish people became a nation. Latterly the church of Christ produced the New Testament. It grew out of the life and ministry of Jesus and their discipleship of him.

I do not think of the Bible as a volume miraculously compiled, but as the slow growth of a literature in which the Spirit of God and the spirit or mind of man combined, and so gave to the world the Holy Scriptures. All the theories of inspiration interest me, though I have never found one that altogether satisfied me. I do not think of the Bible as a jigsaw puzzle of prophecy or a storehouse of proof texts, or cryptic expressions that cannot be understood save in some supernatural way. It is a book of life, not of enigmas. I believe in the Bible as a progressive revelation of God reaching its culmination in the radiant life and ministry of Jesus. I can say with deep sincerity that I subscribe to Whittier's words so gloriously true:

> We search the world for truth; we cull
> The good, the pure, the beautiful
> From graven tomb and written scroll,
> From all old flower-fields of the soul;
> And, weary seekers of the best,
> We come back laden from our quest
> To find that all the sages said
> Is in the Book our mothers read.

IV

I believe in heaven, not a heaven of literal golden streets, walls of jasper, and gates of pearl, although I dearly love to dream over such beautiful imagery. I believe in the heaven of peace of mind and conscience that comes as a result of endeavoring to do the will of God as exhibited in the life and teachings of Jesus. I believe in the heaven of comradeships of the like-minded here, and by and by of the spirits of just men made perfect. I believe in the heaven of high resolutions, noble dedications, grand pioneering ventures, as one follows the Prince of Peace and climbs "the steep ascent of heaven, through peril, toil and pain," he follows in the train of the Son of God. And if I may quote from an old revival hymn, "I'm living in heaven now."

I believe in hell, not the hell of medieval theology, fire, brimstone, and the bottomless pit, though such language is not meaningless. It is not possible to burn the soul. One cannot scourge a spirit with many stripes. Those are flaming figures and were never meant to be taken literally. But they do stand for something, experiences that must be real. I believe in a hell where selfishness has its perfect way and eventually reaps what it sowed. I believe in a hell of wilful perversion of what is good, true, and beautiful. I believe in a hell of blasted opportunities, of the wages of frightful disloyalties, and the fruitless attempt to escape the heavy responsibilities that come as part of life and love and belong to the way of sacrifice. There are some things in the philosophy of Omar which are distinctly pagan, but there is a sense in which the teaching of his famous quatrain is only too true.

> I sent my soul into the invisible
> Some letter of the after life to spell,
> And by and by my soul returned to me
> And answered, "I myself am heaven and hell."

V

I believe in the church! The church never has been perfect, was not in the great old days of first century Christianity, could not be in the nature of things. It will never be perfect in this world. It is made up of men and women and little children, struggling toward the truth and light. I believe in the church despite its limitations, handicaps, complacencies, strange in-

consistencies. It is the only institution in the world that provides a place where human beings can come together to worship God. It is the only institution we know that provides for the whole family the spiritual and social needs from childhood to old age. I do not believe in the present church as much as I believe in the church that is to come, but my belief in the church of the present is such as to lead me to invest my life in it and to find an immense satisfaction in a ministry that has never attained my ideal. But my ministry is within the church and for the church that the church may minister to all humanity. I believe the church can only save its life by losing it for Christ's sake. The

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church is a means, a road, and the road to heaven needs mending. It is a school, a comradeship. It is an agency of the Spirit, an instrument of the Eternal. It has changed through the passing years and will continue to change. It will make mistakes. It may fail in dreadful crises only to emerge again to conquer when all seems lost. Yes, I believe in the church with all its frailties. I love the church for what it may yet achieve in the long, long vista of the coming centuries.

Let no man think that sudden in a minute
All is accomplished and the work is done,—
Though with thine earliest dawn thou shouldst begin it
Scarce were it ended in thy setting sun.

VI

I believe in humanity, men, women, and little children. I believe that "all God's chillen got wings." What a foolish idealist I am, what a dreamer! "All God's chillen got wings!" Oh, I'll confess that some of the wings have not sprouted, that some are soiled, some are broken, and that many of God's children who have wings have never flown. And they have not flown because they haven't had a chance to fly. Their wings have been clipped by circumstances over which they had no control. I know something of the depths to which humanity can sink, but I also know the heights to which a human being can climb. Jesus knew what was in man, yet he founded his kingdom upon the belief that men and women would respond to his gospel appeal, and that he could trust them. He was disappointed in certain instances, and for a time, but not in the end. Of the twelve men that he chose to be associated with him in his magnificent adventure, while they were all disappointing at times, eventually eleven of the twelve fulfilled his confidence in them, and the one who betrayed him brought the blood money back to those who paid it out, flung it at their feet, crying, "I have sinned in that I have shed innocent blood." Human beings have sometimes disappointed me, but not often, and not seriously. More often I have been surprised and overjoyed by unexpected loyalties on the part of those in whom I could have excused, if not condoned, failure to measure up to responsibilities. I believe that penitent humanity in comradeship with the Eternal Christ can work out, not only the salvation of individuals, but of nations, and the wide world. I believe in humanity because Christ believed in humanity and so loved humanity that he gave his all for the least and lowliest of mankind.

VII

I believe in the movement within the church for the unity of the church, the body known as Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, or Christian churches! There are at least two interpretations of every movement, party, institution. Thus there are two interpretations of the constitution of the United States, one of the letter, the other the spirit; two interpretations of the republican party, one narrow, the other broad; two interpretations of the democratic party, one reactionary, the other liberal. There are two interpretations of the communion of which I am a member, one narrow, the other generous. Progressively interpreted the Disciples of Christ embody a noble plea and an arresting program. They cherish the dream of a reunited church, and make Christ central in teaching and life. They emphasize unity but not uniformity. It is a roomy fellowship, holding to a universal creed: "I believe in Christ as the Son of God and my personal Savior."

VIII

I believe in the American republic! I believe in its institutions and the spirit of democracy. I do not believe it has failed. I think it is broken down temporarily, and needs to be overhauled, rejuvenated. This republic was an experiment in government and it still is. The constitution may be expanded, amended, or so interpreted as to meet new conditions. Whatever is good in socialism or communism may be appropriated by our government and embodied in our structure without going to the extremes or developing a warring and dangerous class consciousness. The people of the United States have the power to correct the evils and

inequalities that are bound to appear from time to time. The ballot is the mightiest weapon ever put into the hand of man in the realm of government. Democracy is not only one great experiment, it is a series of experiments. I believe our republic will endure, not because there is anything inherently endurable in its structure, but because that structure looks to the people for renovation from time to time, for periodical housecleanings, for scourings, and polishings, and the liberal use of disinfectants when the case requires. To me there are few subjects so fascinating as American history and the story of our humble beginnings as a nation. Our nation cannot endure without faith in the God of our fathers, faith in humanity, faith in the dream that the pioneers and pathfinders knew, and were not disobedient to the heavenly vision. I believe in love of country, but not to the exclusion of good will toward other countries, and devotion to the global objective of the Christian faith. I believe in an intelligent and dynamic spirit of internationalism, and withal, I can say as Daniel Webster said at the close of a stirring oration when, overcome with emotion, he exclaimed: "Thank God, I, I, also, am an American."

In the thirteen years of my Detroit ministry, despite wearing administrative responsibilities, and the awful grind of a great building program, I have never ceased to think of my pulpit responsibilities as primary and insistent. I have not given the sermon the secondary consideration, any sermon. Every time I have come into the pulpit, I have felt myself to be on the brink of what I love to call a high adventure. There is a good deal of mystery about preaching. No one can tell anybody else how to preach. One may suggest themes to the minister but the development of these themes must be peculiarly his own.

During these thirteen years I have covered a wide range of topics, dealt with many subjects, all of which found their destination in Christ. Some interpretations that I could present with a note of finality a decade ago I could not so present now. That is, my emphasis has changed, the point of view shifted, and I suppose, and indeed I pray, that if I am preaching ten years from today, as I hope I may, new light will have fallen upon my way and I shall have discovered new approaches to old truth which at this moment I do not know exist. I suppose there is a liberal flavor to my preaching, and that I take the broader view on almost any theme I select. The open mind, the broader spirit, have always lured me. God made me so. I can do no otherwise. If I know myself I am liberally inclined, but I am not a radical; progressive but not iconoclastic. I pray I never shall lose the spirit of protest, venturesomeness, willingness to take risks for the causes for which Jesus gave his life.

When I was twenty-eight years old in a conversation with a dear old Kentuckian, an elder in one of my early churches, I told him of my dreams and hopes and plans. He was a blunt old man, true as steel, and when I said to him, "I expect to be a good preacher by the time I am fifty years old," he retorted, "I certainly hope so." And that's that! Well, I am still learning, still a pupil in the vast school of that Teacher of teachers, Preacher of preachers, Christ Jesus who came preaching. I am still dreaming of a preaching goal such as I have not yet apprehended; but I press on.

Today, at the beginning of the fourteenth year of my Detroit ministry I thank you for your patience, your courtesy, and for the growing unity of a blessed comradeship, and for the splendor of your cordial support. This is a time of uncertainty and of tremendous testing here in Detroit. I am going on with you into this fourteenth year, trusting in you, believing in you, and in the God of our fathers whom we love and shall serve

Till the sun grows cold
And the stars are old
And the leaves of the Judgment
Book unfold.

"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Unexpected Laughter

By Albert Edward Day

And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh; every one that heareth will laugh with me. Genesis 21:6.

THERE is a laughter that is spontaneous when life is going well, when hopes are realized and dreams come true, when labor achieves its result and love wins a satisfying response, when there is a sense of rightness within and of harmony without, when one is pleased with himself and work and his friends and his past and his future, when the heart dances and the mind prances, and one would like to run through the streets shouting from very gladness of soul.

Lost Laughter

The tragic feature of our time is that such laughter has so largely disappeared. Men and women still have their little jokes but most of the time they are the banter with which people are trying to escape for a little while "the weary weight of this unintelligible world." They still go to movies and laugh at comedy, if it is comic, but often the way they laugh and the thing at which they laugh make one feel that a sob is not far away. There is a deep undercurrent of sadness in the people one knows best which stifles the merriment out of which spontaneous and saving laughter comes. They are not happy about themselves or their situation or the plight of their friends or life in general. A few days ago I sat in the home of a collector for a business firm in the city and he said, "Everywhere you go you hear such tales of woe; everybody is depressed and discouraged and bordering on despair." But no pastor needs to hear any such testimony from anybody else. His work brings him constantly into the presence of troubled hearts and anxious minds. Rare indeed is the encounter with anybody who seems happy enough even to smile just because he is glad to be alive. Some of you are beginning to be afraid that you never will laugh again in the exuberance of spirit which in the long ago sent you to your office like a burst of sunshine

and brought you home again like a song. You have toiled and you have prayed but life seems to be closing in on you like an indescribable darkness, determined to exclude you from sunshine and song forever.

Unexpected Laughter

So I bring you the story of one who thought she could never laugh again but did, with such joyous, infectious, thrilling laughter that her neighbors were caught in the current of her jubilation and swept out to the sea of gladness. "God hath made me to laugh so that all that hear will laugh with me." She was a

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childless woman. The calendar said that she must die childless. The years of motherhood were past and she was lonely, lonely as only a mother heart can be when it has no one to mother. There is a loneliness of those who once had but lost and it is a tragic loneliness.

> If I could mend a broken cart today,
> Tomorrow make a kite to reach the sky—
> There is no woman in God's world could say
> She was more blissfully content than I.
> But ah! the dainty pillow next my own
> Is never rumpled by a shining head,
> My singing birdling from its nest has flown,
> The little boy I used to kiss is dead!

There is a poignancy in those lines which makes one hesitate even to quote them in public lest they awaken in the audience suffocating memories of heartbreak. But the mother who has had and lost at least has memories, memories of the baby's first low cry; memories of the nursery and the crib and the bath, of arms warmed and thrilled by what they enclosed, of a pink face peering astonishedly at this new world into which it had come, of little feet learning to walk and a childish tongue making its first awkward words. Sarah had no such memories. No cry confirmed her motherhood. Her arms had always been empty and her tent always a place of childless silence. And she was going down to the grave desolate and forlorn. But Sarah had another sadness besides that of her own sense of desolation, the sadness of social reproach. Among her people the women who had a large family were praised in the gates while the barren sat as a mourner in the midst of festive gatherings. Barrenness and widowhood stood on the same plane and both were the object of pity and commiseration. The childless woman was believed to be under some divine displeasure. It was God who had shut against her the door to motherhood. Sarah's plight was therefore a miserable one. Her own heart was bereft of that which it most craved and was burdened with a consciousness that her neighbors pitied her and with a conviction that God had forsaken her. She might be brave and carry on; she might still smile wearily at campfire pleasantness; she might even wrap herself in the garment of levity so that no one would even guess how sad her heart really was. But she was sure that never again would she be in the mood in which laughter would well up from within as spontaneously as a song from the throat of a lark at dawn. But laughter overtook her nevertheless. First, when the word came to her that she was to have a child—the laughter of incongruity. It was impossible as to actually be ridiculous. Second, when the child was born and she knew that her dream had come true, that life was kind, that God was not angry with her—the laughter of fulfilment, of sheer gladness at being alive and being the woman she was and having what at long last had come to bless her home.

I am not here to raise with you a question about the historicity of that strange chronicle. I am here to affirm that it is a significant parable of life; that life is full of unexpected gaiety; that laughter is just around the corner for a multitude whose hearts today are so heavy with grief and fear that they feel that they will never laugh again with that spontaneous joy, that effervescent glee, which made the house of their childhood echo and re-echo.

Laughter After Tears

It may be a laughter after tears. Two hours after midnight I stood on the unlighted platform of the railway station in an unlighted town to meet a woman who was returning with the dead body of her beloved to give him burial in the family lot in the humble cemetery nearby. The through train stopped with a screaming of brakes and a stir of dust and presently, clad in deep mouring, the bereaved woman alighted from the train. When I stepped up to meet her she seized my hand almost convulsively and said with a sob, "Doesn't God want me ever to smile again?" I knew the reason for that question. Death had visited that home so often and left it so desolate that it did not seem possible that joy should ever again be a guest. But the years have brought their healing ministry and their new relationship and she has had many a smile since.

I sometimes wonder if she remembers the mournful question she put to me out of her woe that black night. If she does, she knows that tears do not always drown laughter nor bereavement make an end of blessedness.

"Look at me," a man said to Dr. Boreham one night, remembering what he once was and surveying the wreckage that remained. And it was a sight to make the angels weep. "I can never be the same again. I can never get over it." But he did and there he is today, the old light in his eye, the old grace in his form, the old buoyancy in his step. Abraham Lincoln was so nearly broken by fate at middle life that his friends feared he would lose his mind and watched lest he take his life, but he came through to perform a task for which not America alone but the world is grateful. Margaret Ogilvy, in her old age, was moved to say "And now it has all come true like a dream. I can call to mind not one little thing I ettled for in my lusty days that hasna' been put into my hands and my auld age. I sit here, surrounded by the gratification of all my wishes and all my ambitions and at times I am near terrified for it is as if God had mistaken me for some other woman."

"By the Rivers of Babylon"

That is life; tears drying up in the sunshine of unexpected laughter, groans vanishing under the spell of unbelieved gladness, loneliness banished by the coming of a love of which one has long since despaired, recognition after years of neglect, achievement after the long monotony of failure. Recall the vivid contrast of the Psalms: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Was there ever deeper gloom resting upon the soul of the people? But to what joy they came! "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad."

I do not want to hold out any false hopes. This is not a Santa Claus world. Causes have results; prodigality brings penury; falseness shatters friendship; selfishness sears the soul and alters the universe. There are penalties to be paid for wrong-doing. We must often suffer for the sins of others. God is not merely an indulgent grandfather more concerned about the gratification of our wishes than the greatness of our soul. There are hard things to be borne and crosses to be carried, sometimes until the end of the road. But this is what I am trying to say: In this world we should never give way to despair about anything that we have desired if it be innocent or about anything we have tried to accomplish if it be worthy. We may be submerged in grief today and tomorrow saturated with joy. Life is full of unexpected laughter succeeding almost unendurable fears.

Laughter Because of Tears

It may be a richer laughter because of tears. It would be dangerous for a mere man to guess what is in a woman's heart. No man understands all women at any time nor one woman all the time. It would be especially rash for a man who can never know what a mother's feelings are to make any too confident assertion about the experience of this woman of long ago, but certainly it requires no stretch of imagination to declare that Isaac meant more to Sarah because of the years when she was childless, when there was no Isaac nor hope of him, when she tried to crowd back her longing for motherhood and to forget the emptiness of her arms. And all our joys are sweeter because of preceding sorrow. Only in contrast does any value stand revealed. If there were no ugliness we should not know what beauty is; if there were no discord we should never be ravished by harmony; if we never had been lonely we should not feel the rapture of loving and being loved; if we never had any experience of poverty we could not appreciate property. Charles and Mary Lamb had a struggle in life, then came more favorable times. But both touching and revealing was her backward look at the old times, its trials and its compensations. She wishes that those times would come again when she was not quite so rich. "I do not mean that I want to be poor, but a thing was worth buying when we felt the money that we paid for it." There are certain joys which can never be experienced unless one has had the antithetical sorrow.

Some of these days, when your tears cease flowing and smiles come again you will know what I mean. When sorrow descended you felt that you could never truly laugh any more. When sorrow goes you will know that you never really laughed before. There will be something new in your laughter, something you never felt hitherto, something you never even knew to exist.

Besides sorrow bravely borne does something to the spirit, softens and mellows and deepens it, makes it capable of vibrating to sweeter, richer tones. A heart that has suffered is like a violin that has been mellowed with much playing. It is the same violin. There are no new notes on its scale and yet it is different. Touched by the same fingers, asked to play the same composition, it nevertheless yields a music, aye, it feels a music it never knew before. Some of you have been played upon by long and grueling experiences, many of them in a minor key, all of them testing you to the very limit. But they have done something to you, something for you. When laughter comes again it will be unexpected, not merely in itself but in its quality.

> Trouble is laughter as soon as it's done,
> Danger is joy when the battle is won;
> The night is forgotten when morning's begun,
> So don't stay too long at your wailing.

The Laughter of Faith

There is always, nearby, the laughter of faith; faith which can jubilate in the presence of impossible situations because it is sure of God, sure that he loves us, that his help can always be relied on; that if we cooperate with him some good is always on the way to

meet us, perhaps not the good that we would have chosen for ourselves but a greater good with vaster meaning for time and for eternity, a spiritual good, which is more important than any material good upon which we have set our desires; some enrichment of sympathy rather than of the purse, some acquisition of virtue rather than property, some exaltation of Christ through us rather than of ourselves over our fellows, some new and more beautiful friendship instead of the old one which by defaulting proved its flimsy unworthiness. There is the faith that in spite of whatever dolefulness and disaster surrounds us now some real good is just around the corner, that, unless we run away from it by our disloyalties and our despairs, will soon take us in its arms.

There was an old lady whom my friend Dr. Carl Petty found at the County Farm. Once she had lived in an atmosphere of culture and security, then misfortune had overtaken her and she was spending her sunset years at the poor-house. But through it all she remained a lady of gentleness and grace; she literally incarnated sunshine. And, when she came to the end, they found out why, for she said she had just one request, "When it is over, I want somebody to sing, 'I Am a Child of the King'." And someone did, and then everybody knew why through the lonely years in a county institution of mercy there was laughter in her soul. She believed in the riches and the goodness of God and knew ultimately that they would be hers. What did she care for a few years at the poor-house! That kind of laughter is always at hand for everyone who loves and is loyal to God.

If the experience of the race proves anything, it is that one of those who trust in him shall be desolate. They may have had what the world calls disasters. They may have lost that which is dear to them. They may sometimes have been very poor and very lonely. They may have had to walk for a while in darkness. They may have felt forsaken, but they were not. They never have been. God was there and out of it all he brought them by his love. And after it was all over they found a treasure which they did not dream existed.

A Christmas Prayer

BY HENRY KNOX SHERRILL

ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, everlasting, eternal, creator of heaven and of earth, who art the source and perfection of all strength, we thank Thee that Thou hast revealed Thyself to us, not in majesty or in might, but in the lowliness and humility of the Child of Bethlehem in whom the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

We confess that too often we have loved darkness rather than light. We thank Thee for that life which is the Light of men, and for giving to us, Thy children, that true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Help us, O God, to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armor of light.

By the manger of Bethlehem, we ask Thy blessing upon the families of this land. May the consciousness of Thy presence be in every home, that parents and children may live together in wisdom and in patience to Thy honor and glory and to the well-being of our nation. Grant to us, O Lord, that we may be as little children in Thy sight, and so enter into Thy kingdom.

For the sake of the Prince of Peace, we beseech Thee for the peace of the world. Take from the hearts of leaders and of peoples, selfishness, discord and confusion. May every inner wall of partition be broken down by the spirit of brotherhood because Thou art our Father.

In the name of Him for whom there was no room in the inn, we pray Thee for all those rejected of their fellowmen, for those in sorrow, need, sickness, or without work, that Thou wilt relieve them according to their several necessities, and that they may feel underneath the everlasting arms of Thy love. In the light of their need give to us, O God, the mind, the will and the vision to build a social order based upon righteousness and justice.

Through the message of the angels, grant to us to know the eternal life of the Spirit, that we may hear Thy voice. Save us from the service of mammon. Give to us a realization of eternal values, that we may serve Thee in singleness of heart and mind.

By Thy guiding star, we beseech Thee, keep us from worldly fears and anxieties. O Thou, with whom a thousand years pass as a watch in the night, as we look into the future may we have the spirit of perfect trust in Thee, and may we fear nothing but the failure to do Thy will. We thank Thee for Thy guidance through prophets and saints of all the years which have gone, and for the noble heritage which is ours. Surely Thy goodness and mercy have been with us always. We commend ourselves to Thy merciful care and protection, praying that Thou wilt use us in this new day.

In the fulness of time Thou gavest us Thy Son. We do not presume to know the times or the seasons. Thou makest all things new. O God, look upon our darkness, our weakness and our sin, our injustice, our hardness of heart and contempt of Thy word and commandments. Forgive us, and send Thy Holy Spirit upon us, that the future be not as the past. May Thy Word become flesh in us, that with power and with joy we may show forth Thy praise in our lives.

All this we ask in the name of Him who came not to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved, Thy Son our Master, Jesus Christ. Amen.

They achieved a quality of soul which they never dared covet for themselves. They had a certain grasp upon reality, a strange poise, a sublime independence of circumstance which made them more than conquerors. They discovered that this world is a vale of soul-making, and that unexpectedly through fires and storms their own souls have been growing into splendor. We ought to keep all this vast deposit of racial experience in mind and instead of sighing, lift a song; instead o tears, give to the world the laughter of believing hearts.

The near collapse of an acquisitive society has brought many of us to the brink of what seems irretrievable disaster. The present shivers with foreboding and the future is black with fears which we dare not even name to ourselves. The dark hemisphere of life is a tragic reality for some of us. But there is a light that shineth in the darkness. We must choose whether we will believe in the darkness or in the light as the revelation of ultimate reality.

Canon Streeter's resolution is a reasonable one for us all: "The world is full of evil but it is also full of good and the nature of things is such that the good is the more fundamental of the two. . . . On that fact I take my stand. On this in the last resort I base my belief in God."

To one who believes this there will come bye and bye an understanding of the experience of Jesus who under the very shadow of Calvary said: "My joy no man taketh from me."

Star-Gate Threshold

BY GAIUS GLENN ATKINS

Though you build your nest high like the eagle, and set your nest even among the stars, from there will I bring you down. . . . Jeremiah 49:16.

WE have always taken our time from the skies, and fitted our earthbound affairs into a celestial frame. Sunrise and sunset, moon-phase, the turn of the sun in its apparent journey from margin to margin of the girdle of the zodiac, the transient gleam of Sirius in morning twilight have furnished us all our calendars and datings. We set our watches by a star and measure our years by the earth's vast orbital circuit. Time, they tell us, is only a form which we ourselves supply and into which through some inner necessity we organize experience. It may be so; we only know that sunrise follows sunrise, that Orion—star-girdled and star-bladed—returns to November skies; that Mother Earth comes back from her farthest outposts to stations over which the morning stars sang together, and that we measure thus the course of our lives and date the sequence of the centuries.

There is no way of saying how our human habits and the very constitution of our minds have thus been shaped and colored. Eternity, the preacher said, is set in our hearts; perhaps time has been set in the structure of our minds from its sovereign station in the heavens. We live, at any rate, in such relation to and dependence upon the sequence of the seasons, which themselves obey a vaster law, that behind any calendar there is always another calendar of festival and observance by which our very souls are colored, in which we acknowledge our own immemorial unity with all the ways of earth and sky.

Of all the habits thus engendered I should count a commemoration of the New Year—older than memory—one of the most significant. The calendars have varied, the responses of memory, meditation and hope have been constant. It is as though some inner necessity of our lives and this measuring of time by the milestones of the years were perfectly in accord, as though to live in order or wisely or bravely we should pause upon the threshold of the Star-Gate through which we are soon to be carried, take account of our journey thus far, and seek increased wisdom and grace for another stage.

I

There are three visions from the threshold of Star-Gate; back and forward and up. They are not perhaps visions at all. They are rather inescapable aspects of all continuing experience. The French have a verb whose subtle meanings no translation ever quite catches. It is twice reflexive, for it takes the verb "to pluck" or "gather"—as one plucks a flower—adds to it the prefix "again" and then turns it in upon the soul itself. It might mean to gather-in-oneself-again, to collect oneself, but it means more. It means some inner recovery and harmonizing of oneself, the realization of an assured and triumphant unity of one's own spirit and one's experience. I do not know how to put this in plain words. I only know that such a reconciliation is the secret of any peace.

There is an old belief that we are spirits so entangled in the alien matter of another order as to make of all conscious life a weariness, of all experience a struggle to be free. It is the price we pay for having a soul at all. Something of this is always inescapable. In our more trying experiences and in periods of excessive social strain, this want of reconciliation between what we seek and what we get, between what we would have life be and what it becomes, affects every aspect of life. Inner restlessness and frustrations are projected against all our horizons and they create between them the embattled tensions of our common life. There are reasons enough for the disoriented world in which we live, seamed through all the fabric of it with hates and fear, cluttered with the debris of shattered dreams; but I wonder if it is not all simply a projection of this malaise of our souls into every field of relationship and shared action. An unreconciled world is the creation of unreconciled spirits.

The first accessible step, then, towards some resolution of the strains in which every society which counts is caught and near breaking might be some reconciliation of our own perturbed souls. I do not say it can be done upon the narrow threshold of a changing year, nor easily done at all. I only say it is an imperative aspect of the wise mastery of life and never more imperative than now. Life is always a series of adjustments—Herbert Spencer thus defined it once with polysyllabic gravity. But the point was there; the adjustment comes from within—that is *life*. Sometimes

it is easier than at other times. For it is, we think—and maybe mistakenly—easier to "gather back into ourselves" prosperity, serene good fortune, health, successful children, what you please, than pain, frustrated hope, lengthening years increasingly insecure, and a sense of having been cheated in what was blameless and beaten in what was noble. It may be that this is one of our most costly delusions, the secret of recurrent defeat. I do not know. I only know how we failed in the reconciliation of prosperity and power to the finer issues of life when we had prosperity and power, and how much the failure has cost us.

II

What each one of us must thus victoriously, creatively, gather back into himself as he stands on the

Gaius Glenn Atkins

threshold of Star-Gate depends upon himself, his past, the front he has exposed to life. It is pretty sure to be, for most of those who are reading this, a difficult affair. We have shared in ourselves, our families, our churches and our friends the consequences of an economic debácle. The older of us may be facing a disconcertingly insecure future—when we had thought ourselves so secure. The younger may have a bitter sense of not being needed. We have seen the eclipse of many generous hopes and been told that we were fools to have hoped so generously, and there are besides our own individual items of wisdom or folly, of sunlight or shadow. It is not easy to take such things back into ourselves and win from them peace and power.

The picture should not be too deeply shadowed. We have had a year of gleam and quiet glory within and without, kindnesses, love, some gift of grace beyond our desert, a touch of the vast healing and recompense which lies at the heart of the order of which we are a part. We call it—and not mistakenly—the Grace and Goodness of God.

How shall we gather all this—the gift, the harvest, the challenge of a year—back into our souls? Never all at once, of course. We do it as we go, consciously, unconsciously, in the fluid action and reaction of life and the days. But there is need from time to time of some more masterful and inclusive inner reconciliation as though, having finished one appointed stage of our journey, we should in some way dispose of it through getting life and ourselves both in hand again before we begin another stage. Star-Gate threshold seems the right place for that; a year is long enough for perspective, not too long for recollection. Its events and consequences are not yet beyond some control—and Star-Gate, like Pilgrim's Wicket-Gate, is a good place to lose burdens we no longer need carry.

III

How? Nothing, I suppose, is ever ended, but many things do and should end so far as our control over them is concerned, and their control over us. Our deeds and words are as stones dropped into water; what waves they create die down and though some diminished impact of them breaks on shores beyond our vision, what is done is done. St. Paul, who forgot so little, said nevertheless: "This one thing I do—forgetting—." For there are two memories of any past: a detached recollection which has no longer any power over us, as though one saw oneself in his past in a procession of shadows, and a tough unyielding recollection which usurps the throne room of the soul.

And the past never rules unattended. It has pride in its train, and remorse. It continues old resentments, rejoices in old successes, warms itself at the fire of vanished happinesses, wears the shroud of old sorrows. A treasure? Yes, in its brighter garments—but it is fertile in mischief. Who can tell how much of the strain of our world is just this mischief-making sovereignty of what ought to be forgotten? I think sometimes we could lose without loss the whole inheritance of history, if at the same time the embattled memories which arm the frontiers of the nations could go with it. If all the world could be stricken with a wisely chosen amnesia at midnight, December 30, January 1 would dawn with a long expected light. If we could forget prejudices whose occasion is so long gone, hatred whose roots should long ago have withered, despairs for which there is no living reason, methods of every sort which time is discarding, even successes and happinesses which bind us to the past with a chain which is none the less a chain because its links are bright, our emancipation would be astoundingly creative.

Let fall from the threshold of Star-Gate into the absolving depths of the past such memories as these.

Again: there is all that bequest of the past year which can not be so dismissed. Maeterlinck, who has written so wisely of our relation to our past, would maintain the absolution of forgetfulness never to be deserved nor granted till we have taken from the past over which we have no longer any control what it has to teach us for the future. When we have gone, he says

in substance, to any joy or any regret and asked it what it has to teach us for the present and the future and gain therefrom a force to lift ourselves above or past, then we are done with it, and should let it go—and yet not entirely. There is always the unfinished.

The unfinished may be a wall half-laid—a situation unresolved, an issue undetermined, an unreconciled relationship; whatever presses upon us out of the past, will give us no peace till we have found for it some harmonious resolution within and without. Any year ends as an unfinished concrete road ends; far down the right of way are the surveyor's stakes, rough grading a little nearer, then the leveled surface, then the steel-web reinforcement, then the spot where they stopped pouring concrete last night. And it is all tied together; finished, half-finished and not yet begun. You may apply this homely analogy to whatever aspect of your own life and our common life you please, but something like it is always there.

IV

There is a road beyond Star-Gate threshold already built yet not built at all, a strange, half-mystic road. The contours of duty determine the direction of it. It will be built out of the extension and continuation of our work, our business or profession into new times and unforeseen situations. It must be laid with once broken dreams made whole again and wiser, with what love asks and gives; there must be the grit of hard work in it, hope-light enough upon it to guide us, experience-light enough upon it to save us costly mistakes, faith-light to give us the assurance we do not build it futilely—or alone. We can not see it far or very clearly, but it is there. Step out on it and go on.

It is just here, in such ways as these, that the past is always becoming the future—the mystic highway of the soul on which humanity and God go on. Only it is no highway at all—it is life. Something is escaping my pen as I write because no man can write it or say it for another. But I know the substance of it is this: One must take what he has gained or missed, his victories or defeats, his wisdom or his folly, losses or gains, laughter or tears, and gathering them all back into his purpose, his wisdom, build them into the structure of his better, braver self—and go on. Here is the source and secret of all mastery—not the mastery of the bloody but unbowed head, but the mastery of a victorious personality which has found that all things *do* work together for good to those who love God and the good. The soul has a power to do that, to gather the harvests of its own ripening from the fields of time. Even an ear of corn takes into its ripened substance and beauty chemic earth and quickening light, wind and storm, rain and sunshine. What matters the ended season when the corn is made? The soul can do more than that.

V

This sermon—which is not a sermon at all—would gain definiteness, I dare say, if it named, a little, besides the varying circumstance of individual life, what in our common life is unreconciled, unfinished, challenging, confusing. We are all tied up in one bundle. What is wrong on all the coasts of the seven seas comes at last to our own doorsteps—each doorstep—and can not be shut out. That we all know and we cannot mend this confusion of broken or breaking orders as we meditate on the Star-Gate threshold of a starry or cloudy night; it needs time and vast patience and all our common wisdom and all our common strength and more.

But we can begin, a little, with ourselves. The key to world peace is more largely than we acknowledge in the souls of folk who have ceased to hate or fear the folk of another nation. Hitler could never have shaken Germany with his murky passion if the folk of Germany had not for years been so inwardly distracted. One key to economic peace is always inside the souls of estranged and suspicious groups. I do not say this inner readjustment is enough by itself—it must go on and on till it reaches and changes the fabric of society and all mass relations. Very likely, as they build a tunnel, we must work in from both ends, using social reconstruction, economic reconstruction, international reconstruction, boring, digging, blasting in to meet brave hopes, generous attitudes, responsive wills, good hearts. But the end nearest Star-Gate threshold opens from our own souls.

Something else is there at Star-Gate besides this meeting of the past and future in our own memories, purposes and hopes renewed. There is a vaster purpose through whose channels the currents of the years flow, toward whose goals they are directed. "And behind the vast unknown, standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own?" Yes, but reaching his own through the revelation and teaching of the past, speaking within his own through what is best and wisest in their little lives, illumining his own with faith and hope and tested vision, assuring his own that they are not alone. Here is the source of all victorious resolution of experience into richer life. Star-Gate is never so dark that there does not fall upon it, upon the ways and minds of all who stand upon its threshold, a light from above and beyond. If we catch its reflection as I catch the reflection of winter sunrise from the golden crosses of a church seen through western windows, the reflection is the revelation of the heart of the Eternal.

There is something finally at Star-Gate without which hope would be a gleam in the dark with no sunrise behind it and our braver purposes a mockery. We call it time—a New Year already washing the threshold upon which we stand with its tides of possibility and opportunity. But what is time but another chance, a road still to travel, a challenge still to meet, the true absolution for all fault, the real correction of all failure. We think too much of what it carries away, we do not think enough of what it brings. We do know, if we are wise in life, that the New Year will, in the texture of it as we live it through, be much like the old. We should be dreadfully unhappy and puzzled without the dear, the familiar and the constant.

But we know also there is in every future a margin of unrealized possibilities, a frame to be fitted with a new picture, an opportunity for nobler graces and goodnesses. It is this vast elasticity of possible endeavor which time makes possible for which at the beginning

of any year we can thank God. We are not done yet, not through yet—simple words of blessed commonplace, but all the wonder of life is in them. We need surrender to no defeat if there is another field to fight on. Star-Gate threshold opens on the dawn and not the dark, and I should think we could hail it with a cheer —"There is time yet, there is time yet—Glory to God."

There is then a New Year's faith and courage which is at once God's gift and our own achievement. If the future is bright, thank God and go on. If it is shadowed and difficult, accept that as a challenge to call our unused reserves and thank God for the chance to match ourselves against his hour.

I have sought a text for all this by the most familiar concordance method and found but one star text—and that a curious one which might do. In Obadiah's song of vengeance upon Edom—this: "Though you build your nest high like the eagle, and set your nest even among the stars, from there will I bring you down—." Yes, the eastern highlands where Edom dwelt and the eagle built her nest were no defence for the violent against Jehovah. But there is a nest among the stars more secure. Our litle world is just that and though we journey through lonely space we are cradled among the stars. The soul has also its own starry home —in faith and love, courage, God. Find there a shelter and you will not be brought down.

Second-Hand and First-Hand Religion

By William Henry Spence

Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Savior of the world. John 4:42.

THE dealer in second-hand goods has an important part to play in the world of trade. His place of business may not be as attractive to the eye as the great department store. Its floor may seem an ugly hodge-podge when compared to the orderly display of Wanamaker's, or Marshall Field's, nevertheless it not only has a right to exist, it is well nigh indispensable. For in it some things, often valuable, are kept from going to waste. They get a rebirth to use. Besides, many persons who might otherwise lack the comforts and even the necessities of life, there find them placed within reach.

Second-hand goods, therefore, are not to be despised. Indeed some goods, if they remain "second-hand" long enough, acquire great distinction. They become antiques. Men pay high prices for them and point to the posession of them with pride. After all, an antique is a used article to which distance has lent enchantment.

There are, however, some things which you cannot get second-hand. You must acquire them directly for yourself and by yourself. No one can sell them to you and you cannot pass them on to others. Take that indefinable something called culture. You can not obtain the culture which another person possesses, nor even the culture which may pervade a community. It cannot be distributed. Neither birth, nor breeding, nor education can give it to you. They may put in within your reach, they may furnish an environment in which it is easy and natural that you should become a cultured person, but your culture is always your own individual achievement. It is your response to what is beautiful and good and true in the things and persons around you. Without that response you may remain a boor in the midst of the most refined society.

Or take friendship. You never get a friend second-hand. No man can pass his friend on to you and say, "he is your friend now." Nor can you propose to Mr. B that he impart to you his friendship for Mr. A. If Mr. A becomes your friend it is because there are qualities in you and in him which make direct mutual appeal. A third person may make you two acquainted, he cannot make you friends.

It is so with religion. You cannot get it second-hand. Of course, there are tools and trappings of religion which you can acquire from others. Your parents can teach you the forms of religion and train you in the use of them. Your church can furnish you a building in which to worship, put a Bible in your hands, set symbols before you, conduct religious services for you and impart to you a theology—all in the hope that you will get religion, but that eventually depends on you alone.

There are many people who have what may be called a second-hand religion. That is, they have accepted without question what other folk have believed, have taken as a matter of routine the forms of worship in which they have been brought up from childhood, and have worked for the success of religious institutions, but they have never really got a religion of their own. Professor Whitehead says that a man's religion is what he does with his solitariness. By which, I take it, he means that one's religion is a direct and original relationship between himself and God. It is the outcome of an attitude toward God which, in the nature of the case, no one can take from him. There is within each of us a Holy of Holies beyond whose curtain none but the High Priest, Self, can go, and what takes place there none but God and Self can know.

Faith by Experience

All this does not mean that others have no part in your getting religion, nor that the church is useless in your quest for a religious faith. They can do much, very much for you. You might never have a religious experience were it not for them. It is possible to make second-hand goods your own by purchase, but more by making them part of your life. You can buy an old house in which generations of others have dwelt. It depends on you whether it becomes an investment in real estate or a home. You can accept the creed of a church, but only you can make it a personal faith. You can assent honestly to somebody's argument for the existence of God, only you can find him as a living reality.

The whole question of authority in religion is involved here. Faith cannot be made by fiat. The only

final authority is experience. "We cannot accept certainties," says Middleton Murry, "we can only discover them." At the same time, it must be said that authority has a legitimate place in religion as it has in other spheres of value. A teacher in a class room is supposedly an authority on his subject. That is why he is there. He knows and it is his business to impart what he knows. His students accept his authority. Up to a certain point there is nothing else for them to do, but the time comes when they need his authority no longer. They come to know for themselves. It is the function of a teacher to lead his students to the point where he is no longer necessary. A chemistry professor may tell a student that

William Henry Spence

if he will do thus and so with certain elements this and that will happen. That for the student is second-hand knowledge; but if he goes into the laboratory and demonstrates the truth of the proposition by experiment, the knowledge becomes his own.

It is the same in the sphere of beauty. One person may rave over a picture, and because of his interest and enthusiasm, another may be induced to view it. That does not mean however that the second person finds the picture beautiful. His reaction to it may be quite the opposite. In the sphere of the beautiful authority may open the door and bid you enter, what one sees and feels beyond the threshold is his own affair.

It is so in religion. Authority registers and reports what has been found true in the past. The church and its teachings, and the testimony of faithful Christians, witness to the reality of experience. They say to the inquirer "this is what we have found to be true." They give a fair presumption that if one follows in the ways they point out, he also will come to the truth. That is the utmost they can do. There must come a time when he needs not their witness because he has made the faith his own. If he cannot honestly accept the authority of a given church, or group, or person, it is encumbent on him to follow that authority which appeals to him until within himself he knows he has found the truth he can live by.

Religion a Revelation

Only, let him be sure that he comes at last to the supreme place of illumination. For the discovery of God is not an achievement of the human spirit, it is a revelation. So one needs to put himself where the true light will fall on him, and there keep his eyes open. Jesus Christ is that true light, and faith is the eyes with which to behold him. Whoever humbly and believingly lets him have his way with him, will soon or late awake to find that he is "very sure of God." His religion will have become radiantly his own.

When the Samaritan woman, who had been talking with Jesus at the well, came running back to the village, with a new light in her face, crying, "Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" her neighbors trooped out on the path, doubtless jabbering with excitement over her story. They accepted her statement so far as to make an investigation—at any rate, that much they were honest enough to do on her authority. Up to that point their faith was second-hand, so to speak. They acted on her say-so. But when they came to him, standing quietly there by the well curb with his wondering disciples, and saw for themselves; after they had invited him to tarry in their town, and had had two days of his gracious presence, they no longer depended on the testimony of the woman. They told her, "Now we believe not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world." So it will be with any soul that will linger in his presence long enough to give him contemplative, earnest attention.

VERSE

Diaries

THE Old Year is a diary where is set
Down, page by dog-eared page, all that I knew
Of twelve months' joy, of sorrow, of regret,
A memo of the times when I was true
To trusts, to friends; what I have made of self.
Here violets are pressed . . . . here is a blend
Of tears and ink . . . . I'll place it on the shelf
When I have added these last words—"The End."

And now I have my New Year book to fill,
No word yet penned in it, nor any blot
Upon the clean white sheets, the pages still
Uncut, though dated day by day. Just what
They will record, God only can foretell—
And, after all, perhaps it is as well.

Ethel Romig Fuller.

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Harkness, Samuel: "'Little Foxes' of the Pastorate" (March)
Holman, Charles T.: "The Pastor's Ministry to 'Sick Souls'" (November)
Jones, Edgar DeWitt: "The Preacher's Vocabulary" (May)
Knudsen, Carl: "Treating Controversial Topics in the Pulpit" (September)
Leiffer, Murray H.: "Church Night—For Adults Only" (February)
Palmer, Albert W.: "The Minister's Public Prayers" (December)
Ruopp, Harold W.: "What Makes Preaching Vital?" (June)
Stone, John Timothy: "Dealing with Disgruntled Members" (January)
Van Dyke, Tertius: "Shall We Stop Preaching?" (April)

Book of the Month

Ainslie, Peter: Some Experiments in Living (September)
Case, Shirley Jackson: The Social Triumph of the Ancient Church (August)
Denny, Walter Bell: The Career and Significance of Jesus (November)
Douglas, Lloyd C.: Forgive Us Our Trespasses (January)
Gilkey, James Gordon: What Can We Believe? (October)
Holman, Charles T.: The Cure of Souls (March)
Morrison, Charles Clayton: The Social Gospel and the Christian Cultus (July)
Niebuhr, Reinhold: Moral Man and Immoral Society (February)
Schermerhorn, William David: The Christian Mission in the Modern World (December)
Schweitzer, Albert: Out of My Life and Thought, an autobiography (April)
Shillito, Edward: Nationalism—Man's Other Religion (May)
Van Dusen, Henry P.: The Plain Man Seeks for God (June)

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The Minister's Public Prayers

BY ALBERT W. PALMER

THE pastoral prayer is, for the Protestant service of worship, what the elevation of the host is in a Roman Catholic mass—the supreme symbolic moment of communion with the divine. Inasmuch as a living personality pouring out his soul to God is a greater and nobler symbol than anything inanimate or physical, this prayer should lift the service to the highest level of aspiration, mystical power and hushed expectancy. That this is not always so, that it may be even a time of boredom and relative inattention, is the fault of the minister and due to his lack of appreciation of its significance, or his inadequate understanding of how to lead his congregation in prayer. It is better for a church service to be known for its worship than its eloquence; and a minister, while he may feel a passing sense of satisfaction at a word of appreciation for his preaching, knows that such words are superficial indeed compared with a quiet and even faltering syllable of gratitude for the prayer.

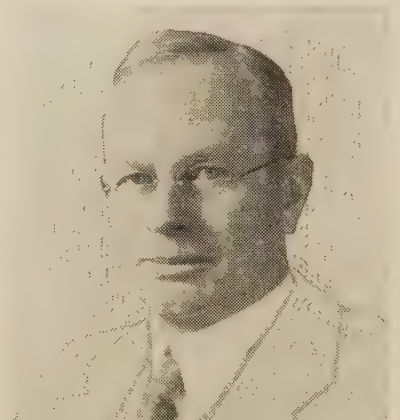
• *A Sense of God's Reality*

A good pastoral prayer depends first of all on the depth and intensity of the minister's own sense of the reality of the God to whom he prays. The religious press some time ago was agitated with the question: "Can the humanist pray?" I think he can—for the present, at least. It is not the correctness of his idea about God which conditions the prayer so much as the sincerity and intensity of his conviction of the reality of the particular God to whom he prays. Better prayers may come from men tremendously in earnest about a very partial, vague and inadequate sort of God than from men of much theism but little fire. Of course, if this is so, it then follows, all the more, that the nobler, more adequate conception of God the prayer leader has, the better; and, in the end, one cannot but feel that prayer will persist in its deepest emotional potency only when God is supremely real and personal. It is hard to see how a sub-personal God will continue to awaken the prayer emotion after the language and unconscious influence of a theistic tradition have passed away. Even your humanist prays in anthropomorphic terms and personalizes his prayers.

The first step, then, in a good pastoral prayer is a spirit of hushed and devout waiting before God as the supreme Over-soul of the universe by the minister himself. If he is not in the noblest sense a priest at the moment of public prayer he only goes through a meaningless mummery and an empty form.

• *Understanding the Needs Of People*

The second step is also a priestly one in its finest, broadest meaning. He who leads in prayer must gather to himself with a sympathetic and understanding heart all the varying needs of the waiting congregation. Aye, and more, for he must feel the world outside and its needs—the disinherited, the prisoner, the foreigner, the forgotten. But, particularly, he must enter with a constructive imagination into the lives of men and women here before him. Let him say to himself: Here are the troubled, the bereaved, the wistful; here is the tired mother, the harassed business man and the numb victim of routine; here are the lonely, the stranger and the unemployed, the injured and mistreated, the disillusioned and the superficial, the tempted, the fearful and the sinning. Even the hypocrite is here! He will do well to remember that the joyful and triumphant are also present. Youth with its vitality and hope, maturity with its mastery and achievement. Religion must not seem to such to be merely a consolation and a caring for the wounded. It must also sound a trumpet in the dawn! All the intimate knowledge and winnowed wisdom of his pastoral experience, as he has gone in and out among his people or as they have come to him with their troubles, will be the background of his prayer. What a thrilling task it is for the minister thus to catch the varying moods of the congregation, gather them all together and bring them, hushed and humble and expectant, into the attitude of worship.



ALBERT W. PALMER

How shall he do it? It will now depend largely upon his sense and power of emotional leadership. He is to lead not only their minds but their hearts and wills. Much will depend on the service which has just preceded. In general it is well to precede the pastoral prayer by a brief but deeply devotional responsive service designated "The Call to Prayer," followed by a verse of some old hymn, sung softly by the choir, and then a period of absolute silence before the spoken prayer begins. This silence should not be too long and it should be preceded by a definite invitation: "Let us now wait before God in silent prayer."

Something depends upon the minister's voice. It should be low but not too low, deep but not too deep and there should be in it a warmth and vibrant quality which is sympathetic without being sentimental, honeyed or artificial. Reality, reverence, reassurance, expectancy are communicated by the voice even before the words.

• *Something to Say*

But a voice is a vain thing unless it has something to say! And so the content of the prayer is all important. First of all, it should not contain too much! We don't need to give information to God—he knows before we tell him. The purpose of the prayer is to bring us to God, not God to us—its keynote, as Fosdick says, should be not "Give me" but "Use me." It must deal, then, with the vital concerns of the congregation — either with the things that are keeping them apart from God or with the open doors by which they may pass into the inner sanctuary. It should never be a sort of disguised bulletin of the week's events or a concealed announcement device like the famous prayer of the college president, "O Lord, bless the French class which thou knowest will not meet at the usual hour but at 10:45 this morning"! And yet it may, and indeed often must, deal with what is in the focus of attention. For example, what minister could help praying for President Roosevelt when in those dark and somber days of March he took over the presidency of the United States?

• *Order in Public Prayer*

Is there any preferred order in public prayer? Order there should be in the leader's mind, but it may well be changed from time to time lest, to the congregation, it becomes routine and stereotyped. In general, the writer finds his pastoral prayer tending to arrange itself as follows: First comes the cry of the soul for the presence of God. "O God, in whom we live and move and have our being, gather us close to thee now in the hour of morning prayer." "Out of the turmoil of the week, out of the dust and smoke of daily life, out of all our troubles, out of all the cheap and trivial things of the passing hour, we come, O Lord, into this sacred place and this holy hour that we may listen for thy voice and hear that only." Sentences like these then lead easily and naturally into the mood of confession. What the prayer-book calls a prayer of humble access, follows almost inevitably: "We recognize, O God, that merit lives from man to man but not from man, O Lord, to thee: and so we come with no false pride or sense of undue importance but humbly and simply, as children to a well-beloved Father."

• *The Wider Horizons of Prayer*

Petitions for forgiveness, new light, added strength, continued guidance, follow naturally and then the prayer lifts itself to look out on wider horizons and we pray for others—the stranger, the tempted, the bereaved, the overburdened, the ill. On it goes to yet wider concerns and interests; the church, the missionary, the city, the nation, the world! And then, before it closes, let it come back to the personal again: "O Lord, beyond these spoken prayers, each one of us brings to thee in the quiet of this holy hour his own personal, intimate, inarticulate longings and aspirations—all we could never be, all we aspired to be and were not, thoughts hardly to be packed into a narrow act, fancies that broke through language and escaped — O Lord, hear these unspoken yearnings of our as yet unrealized and nobler selves as we lift them to thee in the peace and quiet of this hour, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen." And then, very softly, as though an echo far away, the organist plays a verse of some old beloved hymn against a background of distant chimes, and the prayer is done!

• *Intimacy, but Not Familiarity*

Of course, it is quite obvious that, in the noblest, truest sense, all this requires literary skill—only it must not be a self-conscious, pretty, ornamental, flamboyant or rococo kind of literary skill. It must have at times the ruggedness of the hills and the realism of a Doric column! The language must be that of reverence and of dignity—it is better not to call God "you," though with uneducated men that may sometimes be the acid test of reality; neither do men want any easy familiarity with that august and mystic Spirit which broods over the universe; and yet there must be something which is beyond reverence and dignity—there must be intimacy! Intimacy but not familiarity! For a man must be intimate with the God of his own soul—intimate but never familiar.

How shall a man master the language of devotion? By loving it and making it a part of himself! Some of it is in the Bible—there is the fountain head, of course. But it is also in the prayer book and in modern books of prayer like Joseph Fort Newton's "Altar Stairs," McKee's "Communion with God," Orchard's "The Temple," Rauschenbusch's "Prayers of the Social Awakening" and Stevenson's "Vailima Prayers." A verse or phrase from an old hymn will often lift a prayer to a new emotional level. Last of all, a man must love and cherish poetry if he would pray. Not long quotations—never that!—but faint and far-off echoes of the great poets which will fill his prayer with overtones that people will hear, not always knowing what they hear, with spiritual joy and uplifted hearts.

• *Intercession the Key of Prayer*

Other things being equal, the minister's public prayers will be impressive and uplifting about in proportion as they are truly and deeply intercessory. A man may well forget his sermon when he begins to pray, lest he preach it twice! A prayer is not an essay or a philosophical debate. It may well be a confession of faith, however, especially as it gets under way—"O God, we believe that beyond our wavering sense of right and wrong there is a justice that shall never know defeat; and that, beyond our imperfect appreciation of the beautiful, there is a beauty which is eternal and undimmed. We reach out to the supreme goodness and cast ourselves upon the mercy that cannot fail." All this is good. But the prayer must go on to *plead* for something. It is the intercessory note that stirs the human heart. "Here is a man talking to God and asking for something that he needs and that we all need"—when the congregation begin to say that to themselves they also are lifted on the wings of prayer.

The objects of intercession may well be changed from week to week. Keep the prayer short by praying one Sunday for doctors and nurses, another Sunday for teachers, and yet another for missionaries and social workers. Pray frequently for the ill, the tempted, the troubled in mind or body or estate, the stranger. People will be grateful to you for constant remembrance of "those we love and those who love us, wherever they may be" and for "the gratitude we owe to those whose devotion has been a benediction to our lives and who have brought us light and healing." Also, as Charles W. Gilkey has well said, "While you cannot preach about the social gospel every Sunday, you can pray about it!" Therefore be an intercessor with all your soul for peace, for racial and economic justice, for the city of love and beauty, for a civilization of brotherly men, for childhood!

• *A Prayer Should be Made, Not Read*

Should the minister write his prayers and read them? Personally I do not do either. We of the puritan tradition have a great word in connection with prayer—we do not "read" prayers, we "make" them. A prayer should be *made,* it should strike the creative note! Of course there is a place for liturgical and responsive prayers, and the writing of prayers is one way to learn how to use the language of devotion. But in the supreme moment the congregation will be lifted higher by one who makes his prayer, pours out his soul to God in unimpeded adoration, than by any reading.

Perhaps a word should be added about what may be called "minor" prayers. How may a man learn how to deliver an invocation or say grace without wandering all over the lot? Here a study of the special form of prayer called the collect might teach the minister how to combine brevity with dignity, impressiveness and spiritual appeal. Just an ascription, a petition, a reason for the petition and a remembrance of Jesus Christ, and the prayer is done! "Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen."

• *Following the Tested Formulas*

Finally, when we pronounce the benediction, let us do so accurately, not inventing weird forms and fantastic combinations but adhering to the great and tested formulas which people know and love. It is "the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit," not the grace of God nor the love of the Holy Spirit nor the communion of the Lord Jesus! I beseech you, brethren, look up the noble and sonorous benedictions in your pastor's manual and use them as they are written.

WHO'S WHO in THIS ISSUE

BEGINNING his ministerial career in the Methodist Episcopal church, REV. FREDERICK F. SHANNON'S first extended pastorate was at Grace church, Brooklyn, where he ministered from 1904 to 1912. Then followed his famous pastorate at the Reformed Church of the Heights, Brooklyn, which pulpit he relinquished in 1920 to succeed Dr. Gunsaulus at Central church, Chicago. Dr. Shannon's sermons are heard by a wide radio audience. Among his books are "God's Faith in Man," "The Infinite Artist" and "The Unfathomable Christ,"

After a long ministry at Allentown, Pa., REV. WILLIAM E. BROOKS went to his present field of service—First Presbyterian church, Morgantown, W. Va. To his great credit be it said that Dr. Brooks has given much time to the amelioration of conditions in the coal fields of his state. He is a member of the general council of the Presbyterian church, and is one of the editors of the Presbyterian Banner. Dr. Brooks has written a biography of Robert E. Lee, and is a poet of genuine gifts. He is a graduate of Princeton theological seminary.

Several months ago REV. EDGAR DEWITT JONES began his fourteenth year as minister at the Central Woodward Christian church, Detroit, and in celebration of the day preached the sermon included in this issue. Before going to Detroit, Dr. Jones had an unusually happy and fruitful pastorate at First Christian church, Bloomington, Ill. He has found time to write many books. His most recent one, "American Preachers of Today," is receiving wide and favorable attention from the reviewers.

REV ALBERT EDWARD DAY *was for several* years minister of Christ Methodist Episcopal church, Pittsburgh, but for a year or more has led the activities of the Mt. Vernon Place church in Baltimore. He has been a member of the Methodist Board of Foreign Missions, the Joint Committee on Education in Foreign Fields and the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America. His sermon, "Unexpected Laughter" was contributed as a special message for the New Year.

From 1906 *to* 1910 REV. GAIUS GLENN ATKINS was minister at the First Congregational church, Detroit, then he spent seven years with Central church, Providence, R. I., and in 1917 was recalled to the Detroit church, where he continued his ministry until 1927. He left Detroit to become Hoyt professor of homiletics and sociology at Auburn seminary. Among Dr. Atkins' many books, "Modern Religious Cults and Movements," "The Making of the Christian Mind" and "The Procession of the Gods" are outstanding.

Ordained in the Congregational ministry in 1894, REV. WILLIAM HENRY SPENCE ministered at Pilgrim church, Cambridge, Mass., First church, Rutland, Vt., First church, Oberlin, O., and Tabernacle church, Salem, Mass. Since 1927 he has been minister of the Church of Christ at Dartmouth college. His brief sermon in this issue of the Pulpit was delivered at Dartmouth chapel.

The Rt. Rev. HENRY KNOX SHERRILL is bishop of the Episcopal diocese of Massachusetts.

DR. ALBERT W. PALMER *is president* of the Chicago theological seminary.

TITLES AND TEXTS

What Pulpit Readers are Preaching About

JOHN SNAPE, Tabernacle Baptist, Utica, N. Y. "Christ Our Salvation." Acts 4:12—"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

WILLIAM L. BARRETT, Montview Boulevard Presbyterian, Denver, Colo. "Courage and Confidence through Christ." 1 Thess. 2:2—"We took courage and confidence in our God to tell you the gospel of God in spite of all the strain."

ADIEL J. MONCRIEF, JR., Bayshore Baptist, Tampa, Fla. "Graduates of Grace." Gal. 3:25—"But after that faith is come we are no longer under the schoolmaster."

FOR YOUR SERMON AND TEXT

Title of sermon

Text used (Write out the text)

Name of minister

Name of church

Address

C. R. PIETY, Christian, Washburn, Ill. "The Wealth of Nations." Isa. 13:12—"I will make a man more rare than fine gold, even a man than the pure gold of Ophir."

CHARLES HADDON NABERS, First Presbyterian, Greenville, S. C. "Shame On Us!" 1 Cor. 15:34—"For some have not the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame."

JOHN D. CLINTON, First Methodist, Fayette, Ia. "God's Building Boom." Psalm 89:2—"Mercy shall be built up forever."

WILLIAM LLOYD JONES, St. James Presbyterian, New York city. "Religious Racketeering." Exod. 32:24—"And I put them into the fire and there came out this calf."

M. J. MCPIKE, First Baptist, Eagle, Ida. "Generous Eyes." Matt. 6:22, 23—"The eye is the lamp of the body; so, if your eye is generous, the whole of your body will be illumined, but if your eye is selfish, the whole of your body will be darkened. And if your very light turns dark, then what a darkness it is!" (Moffatt).

FRANK H. FERRIS, Fairmont Presbyterian, Cleveland Heights, O. "A Good Word for Rugged Individualism." Ezek. 18:30—"I will judge you, everyone according to his ways, saith the Lord."

The Editor's Page

The Event of the Month

THE RECOGNITION of Russia breaks a sixteen year taboo. And now that the taboo is broken, we shall probably find that the dangerous and disagreeable things which we were taught would follow recognition were mere goblins, creatures of our fear.

Russia is Recognized

President Roosevelt has earned the applause of the nation for his courageous action. After all, this nation has less reason than any other to be afraid of communism, and nothing can foster communism like being afraid of it. But the question of communism or capitalism or fascism is a nation's own business as far as recognition is concerned. We do not recognize a nation because we approve of its form of government, nor does our recognition imply such approval—not in the case of Germany or Italy, nor yet in that of Russia. Recognition is a basis of getting along together in a world in which we cannot avoid one another if we would. There are some things, in addition to trade, in which Russia and the United States can work together —world peace, for example. Both of us wish disarmament, and it cannot be too drastic for either of us. I wish the joint statement by the President and Mr. Litvinov might have sounded this note. It would have put new life into the disarmament conference which I fear is dying.

The Book of the Month

THE CHRISTIAN MISSION IN THE MODERN WORLD, *by William David Schermerhorn. The Abingdon Press.* $2.50.

MANY books have appeared giving a survey or outline of the missionary enterprise, but I have found none that contains so much in small compass as this book by Professor Schermerhorn. It covers the entire history of Christianity from Paul's journeys to the Laymen's inquiry. The essence of a compact work of this kind is its principle of selection. So much must be left out. So little can be put in. The author leaves you with a feeling of satisfaction that the really relevant and important things have been included and that the things which have been omitted are secondary or unimportant. The missionary activity is treated with a vivid awareness of other activities proceeding from the Christian west—trading, warfare, international politics, economic aggressions. You thus avoid the fixation fallacy—a fallacy resulting from a narrow focussing of attention upon the single fact that these Chinese or Japanese are sinners, and nothing more. Of course they are sinners, as are we all, and Christ is their savior, as he is ours. But they are also the inheritors of a proud culture, and they have had experiences with western commerce and militarism which have aroused specific attitudes with which the missionary must reckon. Therefore, in the case of each mission country, Dr. Schermerhorn deals with those contacts with "Christian" nations which patently deny much that is of the essence of the gospel. This book should be at the minister's elbow. He will be constantly referring to it for facts, for dates, for light on every problem of Christian missions. The author was himself a missionary, later a professor in Garrett Biblical Institute, and was a member of the Round-the-World deputation sent by the American church history society in 1931-32. The whole text is up to date. Even the maps show Manchukuo.

A Thought for the Month

ONE of my favorite texts is that verse in Hebrews which pictures a great multitude in an amphitheatre looking on as we run our race in the stadium below. We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses. All who have gone before us are watching us eagerly, because they have a stake in our performance. They are the heroes of all the past, but for all their achievement they had to leave their own race unfinished. None—none save our Lord himself—finished the work which was given him to do. And even our Lord, as Paul teaches, left the cup of his suffering to be filled up by all heroic and faithful souls who have fellowship with him in the way of the cross. Great heroes of all our yesterdays look down upon us as participants in our race—for they without us cannot be made perfect! History is a continuum. The present and the past are organically connected. History is a relay race—we start at the point where other runners left off and our race is the extension of theirs. They cannot win unless we win! We depend on them no more than they depend on us! Think of the unfinished tasks which those who made history have handed on to us! Jefferson achieved democracy—but we stagger under the responsibility of making democracy democratic. Lincoln achieved emancipation—but left us the race problem. Luther achieved the reformation—but left us the immeasurable task of recovering the lost unity of the body of Christ. The missionaries planted the gospel in the orient—but we have to solve the delicate problem of cultural contacts growing out of their initial successes. Name any great achievement of the past and you will find that it is not a finished achievement at all but a starting point for further achievement. That is the way life is made. We cannot be true to the faith of our fathers by living our fathers' lives over again, but by carrying forward our fathers' adventure.

Completing the Faith Of Our Fathers

Charles Clayton Morrison

Baptist Number

of The Christian Century Pulpit

In the JANUARY (1934) Number of The Christian Century Pulpit the Editor abdicates his role as selecter of sermons in favor of the more than 6000 ministers of the Northern Baptist church. These pastors were asked to select by ballot the *seven ministers* of their fellowship whom they would choose to represent them in the special Baptist Number which is to be published in January. They have cast their votes, and have made their choice.

The seven ministers selected are:

WILLIAM S. ABERNETHY
Calvary Baptist church, Washington, D.C.

ALBERT W. BEAVEN
President Colgate-Rochester Divinity School

J. WHITCOMB BROUGHER
Tremont Temple Baptist church, Boston

BERNARD C. CLAUSEN
First Baptist church, Pittsburgh

HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK
Riverside church, New York

CHARLES W. GILKEY
Dean University of Chicago chapel

HAROLD C. PHILLIPS
First Baptist church, Cleveland

This BAPTIST NUMBER is going to be the most commanding issue of The Christian Century Pulpit in its more than four years of publication. And that is saying a good deal — for Pulpit readers are aware of the quality of the regular numbers which have appeared during these years.

The Baptist Number is the first of a series of Denominational Numbers which will be published from time to time, along with the regular numbers. There will be a Congregational-Christian Number, a Southern Presbyterian Number—Lutheran, Episcopal, Disciples, etc., etc. The Baptists are giving us a feast in the January issue, and every reader of the Pulpit is going to be on tiptoe to see whether the other fellowships are able to match the quality of these "Baptist sermons."

Further announcements of other Denominational Numbers will appear from time to time. More than 100,000 ballots have been going out to the ministers of the leading denominations of the entire country, and the Representative Preachers of the various fellowships will soon be known — when the votes are all in.

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